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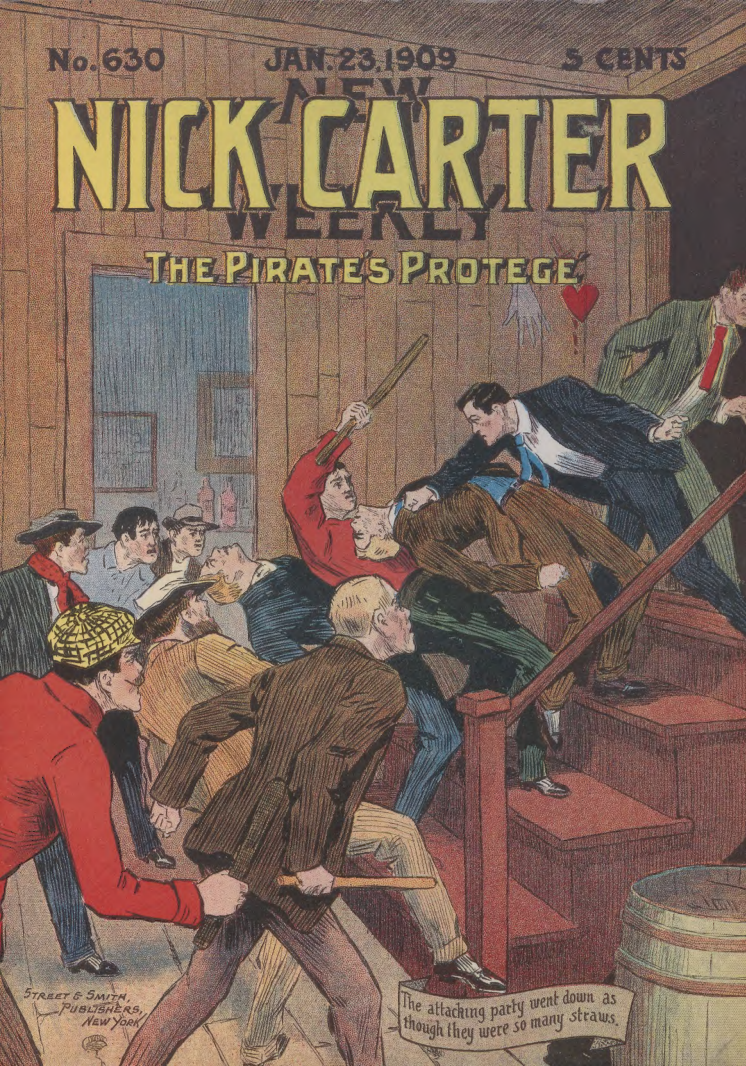
NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

THE PIRATE'S PROTEGE



The attacking party went down as though they were so many straws.

STREET & SMITH, PUBLISHERS, NEW YORK

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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An Heiress to Millions;

OR,

NICK CARTER'S REMARKABLE FEE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERY ABOUT BUTTONS.

The time was fifteen minutes past midnight, and Nick Carter had just entered his study after a very busy day. Joseph, who had waited up for his master was standing near while the detective divested himself of his coat and substituted a house-jacket. Then the faithful servitor unlaced Nick's shoes and replaced them with slippers, after which he brought him a cigar and a match and was about to withdraw when the door-bell rang.

Joseph looked at his master inquiringly to discover if he would receive anybody, and the detective, replying to the implied question, said:

"See who it is, Joseph. Unless it is a matter of exceeding importance, I don't care to see anybody to-night."

"Very well, sir," replied Joseph.

Five minutes later he returned to the study.

"It is a man, sir," he said; "the biggest man I most ever saw. He insists upon seeing you, sir, and he told me that if I would just say that it was Sandy Bragg, you would receive him at once, even though you had retired."

"Sandy Bragg! Of course I will see him. Bring him to the study, Joseph."*

A moment later the doorway was filled by the huge proportions of the chief of the river pirates, who entered the detective's study with the ease and grace of one who had been accustomed to such surroundings all his life.

"Well, well, well, Sandy!" exclaimed Nick, rising and greeting his midnight caller. "This is a very great surprise, indeed. You received me once in your sanctum, down under the old pier, but I did not expect you would return my visit quite so soon. You are very welcome. Help yourself to a cigar and a chair and make yourself quite at home. How are you?"

Sandy chuckled.

"Asking after my health is like remarking that it is a pleasant day in the City of Mexico," he replied. "Down there every day is a pleasant one; and I am always well. But I did not come here to-night to talk about the climate of Mexico, or my own health."

"I suppose not."

*Sandy Bragg, chief of River Pirates, is introduced to the readers in the preceding number (629) of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY, where "Buttons" also first appears. It will be worth while to read it, although it is not necessary.

"I came to talk about Buttons."

"Oh, yes, Buttons! How is Buttons, Sandy? What a bright little chap he is."

"It is my fashion, Carter, as perhaps you have already discovered, to get right down to cases. I'm no hand to beat about the bush. Buttons has disappeared."

"Buttons has—*what?*"

"Disappeared. Vanished. Vamosed. Skipped. He has run away or he has been taken away, I don't know which; only it doesn't seem to me that the latter condition is likely."

"No, I don't know who would have any interest in abducting little Buttons, Sandy. Are you sure that you are right about it? Isn't it all a mistake, somehow?"

"I am afraid not, Carter. He has been gone more than a week."

"More than a week? And you have only just come to me about it?"

"Well, you see I didn't know about it myself until this afternoon—late this afternoon, at that."

"Still, who in the world could have any interest in doing anything to Buttons, Sandy? He isn't old enough to have enemies. He even has the reputation among the other street boys of the city for being a little bit queer, on account of that habit of his of sewing fast to his clothing every button he finds. More than two thousand buttons Bill Gunn told me the boy had sewed fast to him."

"All the same it wouldn't be at all like the little shaver to run away, would it?"

"I should judge not, from what I have seen of him."

"Nick, I love that little chap just the same as if he were my own. Bill Gunn has precisely the same sort of affection for him. You know he lived with Bill; that is, he slept at Bill's place?"

"Yes; I knew that."

"Well, ten days ago, counting back from to-night, Buttons didn't show up at the usual time, but, although it wasn't his habit to be late, Gunn didn't think much about it. He had some business mapped out for that particular night, and when it came time for him to go and attend to it, he went. He didn't get back till daylight in the morning, but Buttons hadn't come in yet."

"Was he in the habit of absenting himself in that way, Sandy?"

"Never. He had never done such a thing before during all the time—about a year and a half—that he has lived there with Bill. All the same, Bill didn't think much about it even then. He was dead tired, and he turned in and went to sleep, and he didn't wake up again till afternoon. Buttons hadn't come even then."

"Well?"

"Bill began to get uneasy. As soon as he could, he went out, and during all the rest of that day he went around among the boys that Buttons knew and asked if any of them had seen him. They hadn't, and Bill began to get leary; mighty leary."

The detective nodded.

"All the rest of that day and all that night, and the next day and the next night, Bill looked for Buttons, but he couldn't get a trace of him or find out anything about him. Nobody had seen him since the afternoon of the same day that Bill saw him last—and he didn't send any word to Bill, which wasn't and isn't at all like Buttons."

"I guess that's so."

"The third day after the disappearance, Bill went to the morgue. After that he took to visiting the hospitals. He says he went to every hospital in the city, and I guess he did, but all the same he found no trace of Buttons; but the effort consumed several days."

"Naturally, it is no light job to search every hospital in the city of New York."

"Well, Carter, over across the river where I live, we thought it strange that we hadn't seen anything of Bill Gunn. You see, Bill is a methodical chap, who attends to his business very regularly. Bill didn't show up, and I made up my mind that he must be sick or have got a bullet in him, or that he had been arrested, and so I went over to his place to find out about him. I think a lot of Bill."

"Yes, I know."

"Well, I found him, all right. He was in his room, and say! He had lost about twenty pounds of flesh worrying over that kid. He had searched and searched and searched for Buttons until he was plumb tired out. He had gone without food, and he had finally made up his mind that Buttons had fallen into the river and drifted out to sea, and whether you believe it or not, Bill Gunn, river pirate and all around bad man as he is, was mourning his life away for that kid."

"I don't doubt it, Sandy."

"That was this afternoon—the one that's just passed."

"Yes."

"It was the first I knew anything about the disappearance of Buttons."

"Yes."

"I gave Bill Gunn—well, I told him what I thought of him for leaving me so long in ignorance about Buttons. But you see, Bill hadn't thought about me at all. He hadn't thought about anything but Buttons."

"I understand."

"We talked it over together, and I finally decided that I'd come here and tell you about it. I told Bill that if there was anybody in the city who could find out what had become of the laddie, that man was you. He agreed, and—here I am."

"There isn't any trace of him, Sandy?"

"Not a mite of one, Carter."

"Let me see," said the detective, reaching for his diary. "How long is it since we rescued Monsieur Gereaux, the chief of the Secret Police of Paris, from the hands of his enemies?* That was the last time I saw Buttons. He was to come here to see me the following Sunday, but he didn't show up."

"I can answer your question without your referring to any books," said Sandy. "It was two weeks ago tonight. Buttons didn't show up at that engagement he had with you for the reason that he disappeared the very day—or night—before it; no, I'm wrong about that. He disappeared three days before he had the appointment with you."

The detective nodded.

"He has been gone ten days. I thought about that when I was talking with Bill. It struck me that maybe the fact that he did have an appointment with you had something to do with his disappearance."

"I don't see how that could be so, Sandy."

"Neither do I; it only occurred to me, that was all."

"But nobody but you and I and Bill Gunn—and Buttons, of course—knew that he had made the appointment."

"I'm aware of that fact, too."

"Well, then, how——"

"You needn't ask me that question, because I can't answer it if you do. It only occurred to me; that's all."

"I understand what you mean. I don't think we need consider that, Sandy."

"You remember what I told you that day, over at the river pirates club?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, I'd like to go over the ground again, all the same. I told you that I believed that Buttons came from good people; that notwithstanding the fact that he was a waif, a regular out and out street arab of the City of New York, he was somebody. Those daydreams of his about the beautiful lady and the gorgeous room and the bright things it contained, all meant something, to my idea."

"Yes."

"That was why I asked you, when you had time, to make an effort to find out who Buttons was; and that is why you were good enough to make the appointment for him to come here to see you the following Sunday."

"Yes."

"You see, Carter, I thought that maybe whether you found out who he really was or not, you would get so fond of the lad that you'd take an interest in him and make something better of him than what he is now growing up to be. It ain't no life for a kid like that to consort with thieves and the like of us fellows. That is what I wanted, more than the idea about his parentage; and now the little shaver has disappeared. It most breaks my heart."

"Oh, we'll find him again, Sandy."

"I don't know about that, Carter. To my way of thinking, somebody has done him dirt. I confess that I'm rattled about it—and it is the only thing that has rattled me, too, in the last five years."

*See No. 629 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

CHAPTER II.

NICK CARTER'S REMARKABLE FEE.

A word or two should be said here in regard to Sandy Bragg and Captain Bill Gunn.

They have been referred to here as river pirates, as indeed they were, in one way, although not according to the general understanding of the meaning of those two words.

Logically they were known as river junkmen; but everybody who knows about that sort of traffic along the river-front and in the waters of New York Bay, understands that when those junkmen purchase articles from the sailors, mates, and sometimes the captains of vessels that dock and anchor in the port of New York, they do not stop to ask unnecessary questions about the place where the goods came from.

Ostensibly they buy goods—cables, bales, hawsers, cases, anything—which the sailors have to dispose of, but as a matter of fact they know quite well that the

things they buy have been either stolen or smuggled by the persons who dispose of them.

That is a statement of their business in a nutshell; and that is one of the reasons why a very efficient corps of harbor police is a necessary thing to maintain.

The police call such men river pirates; they call themselves junkmen.

Among that class, Sandy Bragg was a leader; Captain Bill Gunn a very efficient worker. But Buttons had nothing to do with all that.

Buttons was a homeless, friendless waif of the streets. He sold papers in the morning and evening; he ran errands; he carried baggage when he could; he did anything which would earn him a few pennies.

But Buttons loved the water; he loved the river-front, and during his leisure moments, was fond of being where he could see the shipping, where he could smell the brine.

In that manner he became acquainted with Bill Gunn; then with Sandy. They found him loyal and true, and in spite of the fact that he was only fifteen years old, he had the head of a man and the heart of a lion.

Gunn finally asked the boy to share his little loft where he slept during the day, for his business took him abroad at night; and Bragg saw in him the promise of his own youth, and felt that, although he had wasted his own life and opportunities he would try and atone for it as far as he could by directing the footsteps of this lad in the right way.

How Nick and Buttons finally came together is told in another place,* but the fact remained that Nick Carter was as much impressed with the strong personality of the boy, as those rougher men had been.

Buttons was the only name he had ever known.

He could not remember when he had been called by any other; neither could he recall the time when he first began to sew buttons upon every available spot of his clothes.

Buttons of every description attracted the lad. Sometimes, when he was flush with pennies he purchased a few; he found some; many were given to him—and every one he procured was sewed fast to his ragged clothing until he was covered by more than two thousand of them.

His first recollection was of a woman who kept a peanut-stand at that time, on the corner of Houston Street and the Bowery. She had been known throughout that section of the city as Peanut Polly, and she had cared for Buttons until he was almost seven years old; but then she died very suddenly and Buttons had been left without anybody.

It was Peanut Polly who had given him the strange name, and the reason for it was that when she found him underneath her peanut-stand one morning when he was about three months old, he had, in addition to his very elegant baby clothing, a string of bright buttons around his neck, and he was cooing and playing with them when she found him.

She used often to tell that story about the baby she had found, and then and there she named him Buttons.

Such had been the lad's first experiences in life.

He was a sturdy little chap, and when Polly died, the neighbors cared for him as well as they could in the midst of the multitude of their own responsibilities.

But they saw to it that he did not starve; they gave him food, enough to keep him alive, and a place to sleep, and, although he was not yet seven, he could stand on the corner and sell papers.

Then, family by family, his newfound friends moved away or otherwise disappeared, until the day came when Buttons, not yet eleven years old, was left utterly alone.

A wholesome fear of foundling asylums and charitable societies had been instilled in him by his associations, and he concealed the fact that he had no home, notwithstanding that for more than two years he slept in barrels or boxes wherever he could—and so he continued to live until Bill Gunn made his acquaintance and took him in.

Every button from the string that Peanut Polly had found in his possession that morning when she first discovered him, was now sewn fast upon his coat. He had formed them into the design of a heart, and they were fastened over his left breast.

At such times when his increasing stature compelled him to secure larger and different clothing, he had spent days in the transfer of the buttons; but always that heart shaped collection was changed exactly to the position it had occupied before—and always the name of Buttons clung to him.

As an advertising dodge it was not a bad idea, either. It sold many a paper for him which he otherwise might not have disposed of.

Such was the history of Buttons.

The clothing he had worn when found had long since disappeared; only the string of buttons that Polly found around his neck remained to link him with his mysterious past.

*See NICK CARTER WEEKLY 629.

He was short in stature even for his years; his eyes were bright and dark, his complexion—well, his face was, as a rule, too dirty to tell much about that, save that it was rather dark than otherwise. His motions were alert and quick, and his naturally shrewd wit had been sharpened by the life he had lived, so that he was exceedingly precocious in every way.

Of education he had none save what he had taught himself; but he could read and write a little, nevertheless; sufficient to understand what the news might be that was contained in the papers he sold; and he read and read every day, studying in his own imperfect way, until he could pass for a boy who had had a little schooling.

If he happened to do anything that was not honest and straightforward, the first to call him down about it would be Bill Gunn or Sandy Bragg; two men who lived dishonest lives themselves, and who were, therefore, all the more determined that their protégé should *not* do so.

They knew—who could know it better—the sin and sorrow and regret that comes from a dishonest act, and in their crude way they were tacitly agreed that Buttons should never grow up to be like them. When they found that he was fond of reading and studying, they purchased books for him.

Then came Nick Carter one morning, to the river-front at the foot of Stanton Street, in search of a trail he had lost and which Buttons had helped him to find. Then the detective made the acquaintance of Bill Gunn. Bill Gunn in turn took the detective to Saudy.

And it was Sandy Bragg who, believing that somewhere in the world Buttons had parents, had asked Nick Carter to try to find them; and Nick had agreed to do so. The rest we know.

"You see, Carter," said the river pirate, continuing the conversation, "I didn't really ever see very much of Buttons. I didn't much like to have him come to our headquarters, because I was always afraid that he'd get too fond of the life we lived over there, and that some day he'd want to take up with it. I had made up my mind that he shouldn't. I had made up my mind that I'd put him in school presently, and make something out of him.

"But always there was the idea that I wasn't the right man to do it. Always I was afraid that my own life would somehow contaminate the kid, and I used to think and think about it, trying to figure out how I could work it to get some good man take him up. Then you came onto the scene, and I says to myself, 'There's the very man to do it!' Well, I asked you about it, and you sort of took to the idea, so I was more pleased than I can tell you. I supposed that he came to see you on that Sunday; but now—*this!*"

"Why didn't you bring Bill Gunn up here with you, Sandy?"

"I tried to, but he wouldn't come."

"Why not?"

"He just wouldn't; that's all. He said that I knew just as much about it as he did, and that I could tell you all about it as well as he could; so I left him and came alone."

"Where is Bill now?"

"Down there in his little loft, worrying himself to death. He won't eat and he can't sleep, and he's as much rattled as I was when I lost my own little kid that I told you about, once."

"Yes. I remember."

"I think, Carter, that it would be a good idea if you'd go down with me to see Bill."

"I think so, too. I will go."

"Now?"

"Yes. At once."

"Say, Carter, you're a good fellow. You make me wish that I was a better man."

The detective smiled.

"I haven't despaired of you yet, Sandy. You remember that we talked that all over once, and some day, when I think the time is right, I am going to take up the subject with you again. Your sensibilities are too fine, your nature is too good, and your ideas of right and wrong are much too keen for you to follow the life you are leading now. I want to see the day—and I believe I will see it—when you will abandon it all, and when you will work among your former associates to bring them back into the right path, too."

"Maybe; maybe, Nick. I have been thinking about it a good deal since we had that talk. But I ain't ready just yet."

"I know."

"I think it's working, though. I haven't been out on the river but once since that day we had the talk."

"Haven't you, indeed?"

"No; and I didn't like it then, either. You set me to thinking. To tell you the honest truth, Nick, if it wasn't for going back on my friends and sort of leaving them in the lurch I'd shake the whole business right now. I'd never pick up an oar or buy another piece of rope again. But I can't go back on my friends."

"Take them out of the business with you, then, Sandy."

"How, I'd like to know."

"Why, you've got a warehouse of your own. You told me that. Start a legitimate business and give every one of them a job on the condition that they will live honest lives."

"Yes; and get guyed out of existence for it! Oh, no; that won't work."

"I didn't think before that you were ever a coward, Sandy."

"A coward! What do you mean by that, Carter?"

"Why, this: You are more afraid of what those men will say if you try to do a good act, than you would be afraid of a file of soldiers with loaded rifles aimed at your heart."

"I guess that ain't no idle dream, either."

"Well, it is the worst form of cowardice—being afraid to do a good act for fear that somebody will laugh at you."

"Maybe it is. I don't know."

"Yes, you do know, too."

"Well, then, I do. But say, all that ain't doing anything to find Buttons."

"I know it."

"You find Buttons for me and—and then I'll talk this over with you again."

"Is that a bargain, Sandy?"

"Bet your life it is!"

"All right, Sandy Bragg; I'll take that promise for my fee. You're my client, now."

CHAPTER III.

BILL GUNN FINDS A SLIGHT CLUE.

The time was after one o'clock in the morning when Nick Carter followed Sandy into the loft occupied by Bill Gunn, in South Street.

Bill was stretched upon his mattress on the floor, looking very ill indeed; and his illness was due to nothing save worry over the strange disappearance of Buttons.

"There ain't any sort of use," he told the detective. "You can't find the kid; he's dead."

"What makes you suppose such a thing as that?" asked the detective, seating himself on a soap-box that took the place of a stool.

"I think so because I have looked in every place where he could be if he was alive. I have searched the morgue——"

"You didn't expect him to be alive if you found him there, did you?" asked Sandy. But Bill went on again without answering:

"I have seached the morgue, and I've been to every horsepittle in town; I have asked every kid he knew and a lot that he didn't know, and there ain't anybody seen him. I think he has fallen into the river or been trun in, and the poor lad has floated out to sea; that's what I think."

"Nonsense, Bill! Are you going to lose your courage like that?"

"Well, maybe I am. I thought a lot of that kiddy, Mr. Carter."

"I know it. But so did Sandy; so did I; but we're not lying down and giving up, for all of that."

"What do you want me to do?"

"First, I want you to brace up and be a man. You're acting the part of a woman, now."

"Mebby so."

"Then I want you to try to remember all you can about what the boy has said to you, when you have been seated in this room or out in your boat, talking together."

"What good will that do?"

"This: I haven't any doubt that you will think of something that will suggest a clue to me."

"No; there ain't any clues."

"How do you know that? You don't even know what a clue is, Bill."

"Well, I know what they ain't."

"No; you don't know that, either. You don't think that Buttons would deliberately run away from you, do you?"

"Not on your life," replied Gunn, sitting up for the first time. "I'd lick any man that said that about him."

"No doubt. He can swim, can't he?"

"Like a fish."

"In that case, if he fell into the river or was thrown in, he would swim out, wouldn't he? Don't you think so?"

"He couldn't if he was tied, or knocked senseless."

"Well, who would tie him or knock him senseless?"

"I'm sure I don't know."

"Did he have any enemies?"

"I never heard of one."

"He didn't carry a fortune around with him in diamonds or gold, did he?"

"Not that anybody could notice."

"Well, if he had no enemies, and possessed nothing that was worth stealing, who would have any interest in tying him and throwing him into the river, or in injuring him at all?"

"That is just what I can't figure out."

"Did he ever speak about having an enemy?"

"No."

"Were any of the boys among his acquaintances down on him at all, for anything?"

"Not that I know about."

"Did he—had he lately spoken about meeting any stranger, or strangers, with whom he had talked?"

"No; I don't think so."

"Now, Bill, try to remember the last time when you and he talked together. I mean for any length of time. When was it?"

"The night before he disappeared. We sat in this loft for three hours chewing the rag about one thing and another."

"What did you talk about?"

"Oh, everything."

"What was the subject that you talked longest about?"

"Why, we began by talking about the night we went out to Bushwick together; you and Sandy and Buttons and me. The night when you found Gereaux and arrested Frank Laborde and the others who were with him—and that fellow who called himself Paul Lafarge; him that was the brother of the two murdered girls you told us about afterward. Remember?"

"Yes."

"Say, Mr. Carter, I wish you'd tell me something about that affair again. I've got an idea all of a sudden."

"I thought you'd get one after a while," said Nick.

Gunn had raised himself from the mattress now and was seated with his back against the wall, interested in what was going on.

"Tell me about those girls, will you? Weren't they the sisters of that fellow Paul?"

"Yes."

"And wasn't there a fortune in money mixed up in the deal somehow?"

"Yes."

"What was it?"

"Adrienne and Yvonne Lafarge were daughters of an ironmaster in France named Henri Lafarge. He died and left them five million francs. Pierre Laborde, a brother to the Frank Laborde you know, was the manager of the works. He tried to get everything into his possession. The sisters were induced to come to this country, and here Pierre, assisted by others, murdered them. Paul Lafarge, a half-brother to one of the girls—they had different mothers—was in the plot with Laborde. Gereaux, chief of the secret police in Paris, came over here after the outfit and asked me to assist him. We arrested all the conspirators save Paul, and sent them to prison; but then Paul found Pierre's brother Frank and made a new deal with him. They abducted Gereaux and took him to that house in Bushwick where they were trying to force him to an agreement whereby they could return to Paris without fear of arrest—and it was at that moment that we appeared on the scene and arrested the entire outfit, liberating Gereaux. That is a rehash of the incidents, Bill. Why did you wish to hear them?"

"I'll tell you in a minute. Do you remember what happened when we made the attack on that gang?"

"Perfectly."

"That giant of a fellow, Frank Laborde, tackled Sandy, and got mighty well done up, for one thing."

"Yes."

"And you and I took care of the others in the room—that is all except Paul Lafarge."

"Correct."

"Then when we looked around to find him, thinking that he'd made a getaway, what did we see? Do you remember that, too?"

"Perfectly."

"We saw Buttons standing in the doorway between the two rooms, and he had a pistol in his hand which he was aiming pretty steady at Paul Lafarge; that's right, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"Do you happen to remember anything particular about the appearance of Paul Lafarge at that particular moment, Mr. Carter?"

"Nothing save that he looked about as badly frightened as any man I ever saw."

"That is the idea we all got; and we all thought at the time that it was the gun that Buttons was holding in his hand that Lafarge was scairt of, didn't we?"

"Yes. Wasn't it?"

"I'm coming to that in a minute. Wasn't Lafarge staring with his eyes as wide as saucers, and wasn't he trembling and shaking like a leaf in a breeze?"

"He certainly was."

"And we thought it was because of the gun, didn't we?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is what Buttons and I were talking about that night before he went away."

"What were you saying about it?"

"Buttons was telling me that it wasn't the gun at all that Lafarge was afraid of."

"What was it, then?"

"It was *him!*"

"Him? Who?"

"Buttons."

"I don't in the least understand you, Bill."

"No more did Buttons understand it. But that is what he was telling me about that last night we were in this room together."

"Go on, then, and tell me all about it."

"We thought that Lafarge was looking at the gun, and was scairt to death for fear it would go off; eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, he wasn't staring at the gun at all; he was staring at Buttons. He was looking into Buttons' eyes, and not at the gun."

"But why?"

"And it wasn't the first time he had done that, either."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"Buttons was telling me that night that it wasn't the first time he had seen Paul Lafarge."

"When and where had he seen the man before?"

"He had seen him twice before. The first time was three or four days before that arrest happened. The man bought a paper from Buttons, down near the City Hall, and when he was paying for it Buttons happened to look up at him and found him staring into him like an augur; and he was shaking and chattering like he was there in that room when the kid held the gun on him. He dropped a quarter into Buttons' hand and turned and walked away, and when the kid ran after him to return the change, all he said was:

"'Get out, confound you!'

"Well, Buttons wanted the change, if the man didn't, so he got out; but in half an hour Lafarge was back again, because Buttons saw him standing near one of the benches in City Hall Park, watching of him."

"Well, what then?"

"Bimeby he moved away again, but he hadn't gone far before he turned around and came back, and he walked straight up to Buttons and began to ask him a lot of questions."

"What about, Bill?"

"That's what I'm going to tell you now, because I shouldn't wonder if that fellow has had something to do with the disappearance of Buttons."

CHAPTER IV.

THE CHIEF OF THE SECRET POLICE.

"'What's your name, lad?' the fellow asked him; and Buttons replied that he had never had any name only Buttons, and he got that he supposed because of the fact that he wore so many of them on his clothes.

"'Why do you wear them?' asked the man.

"'Because I like to,' replied the kid.

"'Did you ever know anybody else who did the same?' he asked then, and Buttons told him he hadn't. Said he thought the idea was original with himself, and all that.

"'And you are quite sure that you haven't any other name?' the man insisted.

"'I suppose as a matter of fact that I have got one somewhere,' Buttons told him, 'but I don't know what it was. It was lost when I was lost, and I was so young then that I didn't know what it was. Why are you curious about my name, sir?' he asked; and the man, instead of answering, just turned on his heels and walked off."

"Did Buttons see him again after that?" asked the detective.

"Not until that night in the house in Bushwick."

"And then he did the staring act all over again."

"Yes."

"And you and Buttons were discussing the strangeness of it that last night when you were together in this loft?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was said about it?"

"Buttons was telling me that he thought it was funny."

"So it was. What else did he say about it?"

"Well, he said that he thought he—Buttons, you know—must look mightily like somebody who had been known to that man, and he was wondering if mebby the chap didn't know who his people were. See?"

"Yes."

"That was what we was talking about."

"What else did Buttons say about it?"

"He had the idea that it wasn't his *looks* as much

as the buttons sewed onto him, that attracted the man, and seemed to scare him."

"Oh, Buttons had that idea, did he?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he explain why he had formed that particular idea?"

"Yes; because on that other occasion the man had asked him if he had ever known anybody else who sewed buttons onto themselves in the same way."

"I understand. That impressed Buttons, did it?"

"Yes. But he told me that it was more the way the fellow asked the question than what he said in asking it."

"What did Buttons say about the manner of putting the question?"

"Why, he said the man was eager; that he bent forward when he asked it, as if a lot depended on the answer he got, and he said that the man looked positively relieved when Buttons answered the way he did. And while we was talking about it, Buttons said:

" 'Cap'n Bill, I believe that Paul Lafarge knows who I am, or is afraid that he does!' "

"Buttons might have been right about that, too," said the detective, in a low tone.

"That is what I have been thinking, sir, since you brought up the matter."

"What else was said between you on the subject?"

"That's about all. At least, that's the substance of it. Buttons said something about not liking the idea of being mixed up in a crowd of that sort. He said he'd rather never find out who his folks were than to be related to villains like Lafarge."

"Quite right, too!" said Sandy Bragg emphatically, speaking for the first time since the conversation took this turn.

"Well, Bill," said the detective, leaving his seat on the box, "you have given me something to think about, and it is just possible that it may lead to something more."

"I'm sure I hope it will, sir."

"The hour is very late, and I am going back home. I'll probably see you again some time to-morrow or to-morrow night. In the meantime, I want you to brace up and be your old self again."

"All right, sir, I'll do it. But you're going to look for the kid, aren't you?"

"I am—certainly. I have been retained by a regular client, and what is more, he has paid me my fee in advance."

"Who? Sandy?"

"Yes."

"How much? I want to stand half, if I've got it; or I'll pay as much more, if I can."

"Bill, you could pay it the easiest thing you ever did in your life; and I'd like to have you double Sandy's fee, too."

"Would you? Well, if I can, I will. Money ain't no——"

"Oh, it wasn't money that he paid me. It was a promise."

"A promise?"

"Yes. Bill, if I will find Buttons and restore him to you, will you make me the same promise that Sandy has made?"

"Will I! You bet your sweet life I will! I don't know what it is, and I don't care; but if it's a promise I can keep, I'll make it, no matter what it is, if you'll find the kid."

"You can keep it—and if you promise, you will keep it."

"All right, then, what is it?"

Sandy was almost blushing, and he had twice nudged the detective to induce him to desist; but Nick Carter had ignored these advances. Now, he replied directly to Bill's question:

"Sandy has given me his word, as my fee in this case, that if I succeed in finding Buttons, he, Sandy, will give up the life he is leading, and will not only live an honest and upright one hereafter, but will also try to induce his associates to do the same. That is the sort of promise I wish *you* to make, Bill."

For a full minute Bill Gunn stared into Nick Carter's eyes; then his own fell; then, after another minute of waiting he looked up again with quite a different expression in his face, and he said with slow deliberation:

"If you don't mind shaking hands with me on it, Mr. Carter, there it is. I promise! And I guess mebby I'll be sort of glad to keep it, too, when the time comes."

"Thank you, Bill," said the detective gravely. "Thank you, too, Sandy. I knew that you were both pure gold underneath the veneering of clay. I'll see you inside of twenty-four hours. Good night."

He stepped out at the door and was gone before either of them could speak again, for he knew it was best to get away while they were both in that mood. They would discuss the future when they were alone together.

"If I can bring those two men back into honest ways of living," the detective told himself as he sought the street, "I will have accomplished much."

On the way to his home he thought deeply upon the subjects that Bill's talk had suggested; and the result of that thinking was that as soon as he had finished his breakfast in the morning he called up the hotel where Monsieur Gereaux stayed when he was in the city, and asked if the chief had returned yet from his trip to the West; for Gereaux, on the completion of the case that had brought him to New York had announced his intention of seeing some of the Western country of the United States. He had taken a trip to California. The reply that Nick received was very satisfactory.

"Monsieur Gereaux returned last evening," the clerk at the desk told him. "It is his intention to sail by the French line, to-morrow."

"Thank you," said Nick, in reply. "Will you send a card to his room, please, telling him that Mr. Carter will call there in an hour, and would be grateful if he will remain in the hotel until Mr. Carter arrives there?"

An hour later he was seated in the parlor of the Parisian's suite, and, having exchanged salutations, Nick at once opened the subject that took him there so particularly that morning.

"Gereaux," he said, "a circumstance has arisen since I saw you last which suggests to me a few questions that I would like to ask of you. When I have finished asking them I will explain all about them in case you have not by that time discovered for yourself what I am driving at. But if you are willing I should like to have you answer them first, without an explanation, the reason being that I do not wish to influence your mind at all on the subject."

"That is precisely the way I like to proceed, Nick," was the quick reply of the chief of the Paris secret police. "Go ahead with your questions."

"They hark back, chief, to the time when Henri Lafarge was alive."

"Ah; something to do with that case, eh?"

"Yes; but before I go into that I will ask you how old is Paul Lafarge?"

"Twenty-three, I think."

"His sister Adrienne was older?"

"Yes. Adrienne was twenty-five, Paul twenty-three, Yvonne just past twenty-one."

"Thank you. Now, I am ready to ask the other questions."

"Well?"

"Adrienne and Yvonne both being dead, Paul is the only living heir, isn't he?"

"It is supposed so; yes."

"Why do you say 'supposed so'?"

"Well—I don't know how in the world you got track of the idea over here—but it is a fact, and I think an undisputed one, that Henri Lafarge was married a third time. I have heard that there was a child, and I have heard the statement positively denied, and seemingly on good authority. At least, there is no obtainable record of such a birth. Is it about the third marriage, or the reported birth of a child that you wish to hear?"

"Both. Tell me about the marriage first."

"It was a most unfortunate one, I believe. That is why no mention of it was ever made in the family, and why it has been in a measure forgotten."

"Why was it unfortunate?"

"Because of an accident that happened to the young wife some months before the child was born to her."

"Wait a moment. I thought you stated just now that there was denial of the existence of the child?"

"So there was; but not of its birth."

"I don't understand."

"It was said to be born dead."

"Ah!"

"And so no record of the birth was ever made."

"I understand you now. What was the accident that happened to the mother?"

"She was thrown from a carriage in which she was riding. She injured her head, and was never the same afterward. She lived until about a month after her dead child was born; at least, that is the story as I have heard it. I don't know any of these things only by report."

"Even rumored report may be interesting, and I find this one very much so, chief. I wish you would tell me all about it," replied the detective.

CHAPTER V.

AN IMPORTANT REVELATION.

"In the first place," replied the chief, in a ruminative manner, "I must again impress upon you the fact that I know none of these things I am about to tell you, of my own knowledge. I have only hearsay to go by, but, nevertheless, I have no doubt that all I shall say is in the main entirely correct."

"I feel quite sure of that, chief."

"Henri Lafarge's third wife was the daughter of one of the workmen in his mills. She was exceedingly beautiful, and also gifted. Lafarge had always been

interested in her, and had paid for her education; and two years after the loss of his second wife, he married her, notwithstanding the discrepancy in their years."

"Was it very great?"

"He was fifty; she was not yet twenty."

"And when was this third marriage contracted? How long ago?"

"I am not certain as to that. I would have to search the records to be exact; but I can approximate it, I think, from what I have heard about it."

"Please do so."

"I should say—mind you, I am only approximating—that it was sixteen or seventeen years ago."

"That would fit into my ideas about it, nicely. Now tell me more about it."

"Naturally there was decided opposition to the marriage. There was the difference in age, but that is not often considered in France, where other things are equal; but here, it was the daughter of one of the iron-master's workmen whom he wished to marry. His daughters opposed it bitterly."

"Nevertheless, it was consummated?"

"Yes. The bride was taken to the chateau near the iron works, to live, and the daughters crossed the Pyrenees to Spain, where they had distant relatives."

"I recall that particular fact. Well?"

"Some months later, when the young wife was riding in her carriage, the horses took fright and ran away. She was thrown out and severely injured about the head. My information about it is to the effect that she was made mad by it."

"Mad?"

"Well, possibly that is not the word. Your English terms sometimes confuse me. The injury to her head resulted in a pressure on the brain which stole away her reason—that is, her reasoning powers. She became at once, like a little child again, and babbled like one. I believe it was said at the time that were it not for her condition, the doctors would have operated on her skull at once, have removed the pressure, and so have restored her faculties; but they feared to do so under the circumstances, preferring to wait till after the child was born."

"It was the intention to do so then?"

"It was the determination, as I understand it."

"Why wasn't it done?"

"She never recovered sufficiently. It was only a short time after the birth of the child, when she died."

"I understand."

"Well, that is about all I know about it. I have always understood that the child was not alive when it was born, and, although there was at one time some dispute about it—well, I don't know anything about that part of it."

"Will you tell me about any rumors you heard at the time about the unfortunate young wife and the character of her affliction?"

"The character of her affliction? Oh, yes. I understand you now. You wish to know what form her madness took."

"Yes; if you could call it madness."

"Well, you know that we in France call everything that affects the mind, madness. It was the maid who later served Adrienne and Yvonne but who before that had served the young wife—she who was killed in Paris still later by the fumes of charcoal, you will remember*—and who told me about these things."

"Well?"

"I will admit to you, Carter, that the maid did not believe the child was dead when it was born. She had what I at the time believed to be an insane notion that the child was murdered by one of the daughters, or by Paul Lafarge, after it was born. However that may be, it disappeared. I have supposed until now—until your questions have set me to thinking, that it was buried on the estate."

"Go on, please."

"After the accident the young wife recovered her bodily vigor, but never her mental poise. That pressure on the brain made her like a child. She did not recognize anybody at all. She thought that every person who entered the room where she was, was another child who had come to play with her."

"Wait a moment," said the detective. "That is just the point that I wish to get at. You say that she was like a child."

"Yes."

"And, therefore, she wanted playthings; eh? Things to play with, like dolls, eh? And such?"

"Yes; I suppose so. But——"

"Wait again, please. Can you tell me if there was any particular thing—any particular article or articles that she liked best to amuse herself with?"

"That is precisely what I was on the point of saying."

"Well?"

"The maid told me that her young mistress had a mania for bright buttons."

The smile that crossed Nick Carter's face at this statement was a revelation in itself, and it did not

*See Nick Carter Weekly 628.

escape the attention of the chief. But Nick said nothing, and the chief continued:

"The poor young woman had a mania for bright buttons and her grief-stricken husband purchased them for her by the gross. The most expensive and the most beautiful buttons he was able to procure. She was always delighted when she received them, and would sit for hours, no, days at a time, save only when she was eating or asleep, stringing them into necklaces, and with those necklaces she would adorn herself and strut around the room as if she were bedecked in diamonds."

"Chief," said the detective, abruptly changing the subject, "I think you told me once that you studied medicine before you began your present career."

"I did. I even practised as a physician, for almost a year."

"Then you are quite competent to reply to one or more technical questions, aren't you?"

"I don't know as to that; I'll make the effort, however."

"Would a woman, injured as she was, transmit the consequences of such an injury—that is, the mental consequences—to her child?"

"I don't think so. Not at all, I should say."

"The child would not be likely to be foolish, or simple, would it?"

"No; rather it would, I should say, inherit the intellectual qualities of both its parents."

"Now, the other question."

"Yes."

"Nevertheless, then, notwithstanding your reply to my last question, could not, or would not that unnatural fondness for bright buttons be transmitted to the child?"

"I should say that it might, or it might not be so. I should incline to the latter theory, although the other is quite possible if not extremely probable."

"Thank you. That is the answer I expected. Now, I will make another temporary change in the subject."

"Well?"

"You recall, of course, that night you were rescued from the hands of Frank Laborde?"

"Indeed I do. I would have been a dead man in another quarter of an hour if you had not arrived on the scene."

"Do you remember the boy who was with me that night? You should, for it was through his efforts that you were saved. It was he who brought your message to me; the one he found in the gutter in Rivington Street."

"Yes; I remember him well; and—now I know what you are getting at."

"Exactly. I thought you would. You spoke of the peculiarity of his dress, that night."

"Yes. He was covered, I remember, from his head to his heels with buttons."

"Precisely. He is even known by that name, you remember."

"I do recall it now."

"Well, chief, since I have been talking with you I have become convinced that he is the child of that unfortunate young wife; that he is the child who was supposed to be born dead; that he is a co-heir with Paul Lafarge, who, because of your French law on the subject, cannot inherit since if he is taken back to France he will become a life convict."

"And that is precisely what I propose to do with him, Carter."

"We will come to that later on."

"But what you say about Buttons surprises me. It is rather a far cry from Paris to New York. If the child was stolen, it must have been immediately after its birth, or, at least, very soon thereafter."

"Yes. Undoubtedly."

"And why would it be brought over here. I should say——"

"There could be only one answer to that question, chief."

"What is that?"

"Because the person who stole it, while a villain in every respect, is yet too great a coward to commit deliberate murder, even upon a babe."

"Paul Lafarge?"

"Yes. We had ample proof once that he had not the courage to kill. That was when he had my friend Connelly in the cab with him and had been ordered to kill him. He permitted Connelly to escape, and so upset all the plans of the conspirators."

"That is true."

"And he did it only because he was *afraid* to strike the blow."*

"That is correct. But how do you connect him with this present affair of Buttons?"

"Do you remember that when we rescued you that night, we found Buttons at the door with a pistol aimed at the head of Paul Lafarge, and that the latter was trembling as if with an ague?"

"Perfectly. He was again afraid."

*See No. 628 of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY.

"True enough; but not of the pistol."

"Of what, then?"

"Of the lad who held it."

"Do you mean——"

"It was not the first time those two had seen each other. They had met twice before; and on one of those former occasions Paul Lafarge asked questions of Buttons which supplied the reason behind the questions I have been asking you, now."

"You think, then——"

"Wait a moment and I will tell you exactly what I think."

"Thank you. I wish you would do so."

CHAPTER VI.

THE IDENTITY OF BUTTONS.

"Chief," said the detective after a short pause, "I have felt a peculiar interest in that lad we call Buttons ever since I first saw him."

"Yes?"

"He is an unusually bright little chap, and he interested me more than I appreciated. I had a vague idea, too, that he resembled some one I had seen before, although I had not the least notion who. Later I found him invaluable in the search for you, and in following the trail to find you after I had discovered where you had been imprisoned. If it had not been for that lad and his help I doubt even now if I could have found you at all; at least, in time to save your life."

"I shall remember that in his favor."

"I wish you would. He took me to the docks on the east side of the city, and there, through him I met a man who was fathering him after a fashion. That man was Bill Gunn."

"Yes. I remember him also."

"Bill Gunn, at the solicitation of Buttons, took me to Sandy Bragg——"

"The giant."

"He is very nearly one in fact. Buttons took me to Sandy, and Sandy took me to you. Well, Buttons had already told me about certain recollections he had which he refers to as dreams; he also told me considerably about himself. Later, Sandy talked to me about the lad, and expressed the wish that I would do something for him. He said he believed that Buttons came from good people and that he had relatives living in the world. I promised to interest myself in the matter, and to that end made an engagement for Buttons to call upon me. He did not come."

"Well?"

"Last night at midnight, Sandy Bragg came to my house to see me. He told me that Buttons had strangely disappeared. Together we went to the loft in South Street where Gunn lives, and there I got on the track of this idea I have been asking you about."

"How and why?"

"Gunn told me of a conversation he had had with Buttons in which Paul Lafarge had been mentioned; and it was he who told me about the time that Lafarge questioned Buttons. One of the questions Paul asked of Buttons was if he had ever known of any other person who used buttons in the manner he did.

"It all set me to thinking. The manner of Lafarge when he saw Buttons, and other things that Gunn told me; and then it came upon me like a flash who it was that Buttons looked like to me the first time I ever saw him."

"Who?"

"Why, if you stop to think about it he is a perfect small edition of Paul Lafarge himself. He looks exactly as Paul Lafarge must have looked when he was Buttons' age."

"Maybe so. I have been told that Paul very strongly resembles his father. If they had the same father it may be that Buttons would resemble him also."

"Well, anyhow, that is what clenched the idea in my mind; and that is why I decided to come to you and ask the questions I have."

"I understand. It was a thoughtful way to reason it out."

"And now I am convinced."

"I think I am more than half-convinced myself. But you say the lad has disappeared?"

"Yes."

"Through whose agency?"

"That is in doubt. Nobody knows. Gunn was convinced at first—until I talked with him—that the lad had been killed and thrown into the river; but I have about decided that Paul Lafarge is at the bottom of the affair."

"Lafarge is in prison."

"No he is not."

"Why, I thought——"

"He was admitted to bail, and he found some one to go his bond."

"It seems incredible; but even so, why should he seek to injure Buttons?"

"My dear sir, simply because he recognized him; and, having recognized him, he knows that Buttons is the only heir who can inherit the millions of their father, since he himself is under the bane of the law. But if Buttons is out of the way, and if later Lafarge can get you into his power again, he may try once more to get outside the law, through you, and then if the estate has not been administered, he could claim it. Don't you see that?"

"Yes; I think I do, now."

"You see, if my theory holds good, it begins at the time when Buttons was stolen."

"Well?"

"It was, of course, Paul Lafarge who stole the baby, aided, or, at least, abetted, I have no doubt, by his two sisters who are now dead. The father was probably hoodwinked into the belief that the child was born dead, but, in the meantime, the elder son by another wife had carried it away to dispose of it."

The chief nodded.

"Paul Lafarge either brought the baby to this country himself, or, what is more likely, he induced some emigrants who were bound for America to take charge of it for a consideration."

"Yes; that is more likely."

"They might have tired of the child and ultimately have left it under the peanut-stand where it was later found by a woman who was known locally as Peanut Polly."

"Well, but——"

"Wait just a moment."

"Go on."

"From that moment we pass over a period of almost fifteen years. Then, in the streets of New York Paul Lafarge found himself face to face with a lad who was almost an exact image of what he had once been himself; but in addition to that, the lad was decked out in buttons precisely in the manner in which the boy's mother bedecked herself after she met with the accident."

The chief nodded his head with decided emphasis.

"The two circumstances taken together were sufficiently convincing to induce a shock, and such a shock that Lafarge, who is weak as we both know, plainly showed it in his face. He started to go away, but was impelled to return even against his will. Then he asked significant questions after which doubtless he resolutely took his departure. He had asked the boy his name, and Buttons had replied that he knew none but Buttons."

"And, therefore, Lafarge would suppose he had nothing to fear in that quarter."

"Precisely; but then comes the next shock."

"Over in Bushwick, you mean?"

"Yes. When Paul tried to escape from that room he came face to face with Buttons; moreover Buttons was holding a pistol at his head. Don't you see that it would have occurred to his guilty conscience then to ask himself the question; 'Doesn't this boy know more than he has admitted?' or, 'Is this boy eternally to cross my path?'"

"I understand, and I think you are right."

"You have adopted my view of the case, chief?"

"I think so; only you will find it a hard matter to convince the courts in France that he is an heir."

"I don't think so."

"Why?"

"I shall advertise for the emigrants who brought him here."

"It happened fifteen years ago."

"Nevertheless, there is hope that they may answer the advertisement, if they should see it. The offer of a reward will stimulate that idea."

"And perhaps also stimulate persons who know nothing about it to claim that they do."

"Oh, we can avoid such a contingency as that easily enough."

"And, in the meantime, the boy himself is doubtless dead."

"Not if Paul Lafarge is the one who abducted him."

"No? Why not?"

"Have you so soon forgotten that Lafarge has not the courage to kill?"

"True, Nick; but he may have found it in this case."

"I don't think so."

"It is a far cry to go back over the lapse of fifteen years to search for those emigrants from France."

"I grant you that; but it can be done. I shall put an advertisement in the *Herald* for to-morrow morning and another one in the *Telegram* to-night. Here; I will write it now and send it to the papers from this hotel;" and the detective pulled a pad of paper toward him and began to write.

Presently he read aloud to his companion:

"Frenchwoman who fifteen years ago brought a boy baby from France to New York City, and who afterward deserted it by leaving it under a peanut-stand will be liberally rewarded by giving positive proof of the same and all particulars connected with the af-

fair, and will incur no sort of trouble. Advertiser merely wishes to establish identity. Address Splendid Reward," etc.

"There, don't you think that will call for a reply, chief?"

"Yes; if the right party sees it."

"Everybody reads the papers in this country."

The detective rang the bell and sent his two advertisements away; then he turned again to the chief.

"I have been told that it is your intention to sail for home to-morrow," he said.

"Yes. That has been my intention."

"I wish you would remain here a little longer."

"My passage has been booked."

"It can be exchanged. I will see to that if you will remain."

"How long, Nick?"

"Until I find Buttons, or know what has become of him."

"I will consent to remain one more week, Carter."

"That will do nicely. I don't propose to be as long a time as that in finding him."

"You seem to be very confident."

"I am, chief. I wasn't long in finding you, was I?"

"No, indeed."

"And I want you to remember that you owe something to Buttons. If you can aid me in his affairs, you will only be repaying a debt."

"You're right. I'll stay till we know what has become of him."

"That's the way to talk. Thank you."

"But I must help you. You must find something for me to do. Inaction is deadly for me, I am so unused to it."

"We will work together in this matter, chief."

"In that case I will be more than glad to remain. But what measures will you take for getting on the trail?"

"I shall go to the Tombs—we will go there together now—and interview that giant outlaw, Francois Laborde. He should know something about Paul Lafarge, and there should be a method for making him tell what he knows."

CHAPTER VII.

MAKING A SCOUNDREL TALK.

"So! It is you, is it?" exclaimed Frank Laborde, when he was taken into the consultation-room where Nick Carter and the Paris chief were awaiting him. He laughed coarsely. "I was wondering what sort of a man would take the trouble to come here to see me."

"Hasn't any one been to see you since your imprisonment?" asked Nick.

"Not a soul. Who would come? The only friend I had in the whole city was the pirate who took your side of the quarrel the night I was arrested."

"But Lafarge! Paul Lafarge. Where is he?"

"He is in prison the same as I, isn't he?"

"Oh, no, indeed. He is out long ago."

"Out? Lafarge out of prison? How?"

"He got bail."

"When?"

"A week ago or more."

"Is that on the level, Nick Carter?"

"It is. Those who know me will tell you that I never lie."

Laborde was silent for a time, but his face was working fiercely as if he could barely restrain his anger. Presently, in a perfectly quiet tone, he asked:

"Why did you two come here to see me to-day? You had a reason. That, I know. I don't know very much about you, Carter; but I know Gereaux from the ground up, as he will tell you. I know him well enough to understand perfectly well that he would never have taken the trouble to come here to see me unless he expected to get something out of me, and I suppose you are built the same way. Now, what do you want?"

"We came here to get you to give us some information about Paul Lafarge."

"Oh, you did, eh? Well, what do I get for it?"

"That point cannot be decided until we discover the value of what you have to give."

"I have nothing—to give; but I have what you want—for sale."

"We cannot determine the price, Laborde, until we know the value of the goods."

"And I won't display the goods until I see the color of your gold."

"Oh; is it gold you want?"

"Not much. I spoke figuratively. What I want is liberty."

"I am afraid that nothing you have to give us is worth that much."

Laborde shrugged his shoulders. Presently he said:

"Tell me what it is you wish to know, and then maybe we can come to terms."

"Well, Lafarge is free. He is out on bail. I want first to get some idea where he might be found."

"His bondsman should know that, if he is out on bail."

"I have an idea that his bondsman will be about the last one to know. I don't think that Lafarge intends to report for trial."

"No; nor I."

"Well, could you supply that information?"

"I could if I tried, I think."

"Will you do so?"

"Wait. What else do you want to know?"

"We want you to tell us all you know about another heir to the Lafarge millions; about the abduction of the child of the third wife."

"Oho! So you have caught onto that idea, have you?"

"Yes."

"Well, maybe I could give you a pointer or two about that, too."

"Will you do so?"

"What else is there?"

"I believe that those two points cover the ground."

"Well, here is what I will do: If you will promise me my liberty within three months from to-day, I can and will tell you all you need to know about both those questions. If you do not make that agreement with me, my mouth stays closed."

"Laborde?"

It was the quiet voice of Gereaux that uttered the one word, and the outlaw started a little as he turned toward the chief of the secret police of Paris.

"Well?" he said, "what is it?"

"I have remained silent until now to see what you would say and do; but now I think it is my duty to speak."

"Nobody is preventing you, that I can see, chief."

"Mr. Carter will make you no such promise as you demand for the double reason that you ask too much, and that he would not be able to keep such a promise if he made it."

"Then I don't do any——"

"Laborde, you will listen to me for a moment."

"Go on, then."

"On the other hand, I am in a position to make you a very important promise, and to keep it, too."

"Oho! Are you? Let's hear it."

"There was a very pretty little Apache in Paris not long ago who died very suddenly, and also violently. Her name was Annette Deveaux——" Laborde started back with a muttered oath. "Ah! I see you remember her. A man whose real name does not appear on the records was her assassin. I happen to know the real name of that man. It was——"

"Hold on, chief; don't mention it, please."

"Am I to understand that you had rather not hear it?" asked the chief.

"Very much rather not hear it," was the reply. "I don't want to know about the crimes my acquaintances commit. What I don't know I can't tell about."

"Precisely."

"Well, chief, what kind of a promise was that you had in mind?"

"This: I happen to know where that murderer is located at the present moment. I expect that you also possess that knowledge. He is where I could put my hands on him in a moment. It would be a very easy matter to have him extradited, and it would be only a matter of a short time after he arrived in Paris when his head would roll in the basket filled with sawdust. Now, if Francois Laborde is wise, he will answer the questions Mr. Carter would like to ask him, because in that case I shall forget all about Annette Deveaux and her slayer; in that case I will not ask for extradition. Do you grasp the point, Laborde?"

"Yes, monsieur, I do."

"And will that promise on my part be sufficient inducement for you to talk?"

"I think so, monsieur. But I would like to ask one question first."

"Well, what is it?"

"How long does your promise hold good?"

"Just so long as you stay outside of France."

"All right. I'll talk. They can't do very much to me over here. Three or four years at the most will be all that I can get."

"Possibly."

Laborde turned to Nick Carter again.

"Ask your questions, Mr. Carter," he said. "I think the chief has convinced me that I ought to answer them."

"Has Paul Lafarge ever told you the story about the abduction of that baby?" asked Nick.

"Yes; but I knew about it myself, anyhow."

"How was that?"

"I was employed at the works when it happened, and I helped to carry it out."

"Oh, you did. When we have finished talking will you make oath to all that you have to tell me?"

"Willingly."

"Who stole the baby?"

"Paul."

"What became of it?"

"I took it to Havre, accompanied by my wife. She has since died."

"So it was you who gave it to the emigrants to bring to this country, eh?"

"Hello! You know that, too, eh?"

"Yes."

"You're right about it. I found some people who were crossing in the steerage. I gave them a thousand francs on condition that they would take the baby to America and lose it."

"What were their names?"

"Eugene Rodin and his wife Marie."

"Do you know where they can be found now?"

"Sacré, no! I haven't any more idea about them than you have. I have not seen or heard a word about them from that day to this. But I know where the kid is."

"Where is he?"

"Why, that little chap you had with you that night you arrested me. Buttons, you called him, I remember. Paul had seen and recognized him. That button business was a birthmark. His mother——"

"Yes; I know all about that."

"Oh, you do! Well, it was all fixed up between Paul and me that as soon as we got through with Gereaux, we were to look up the little chap Buttons and drop him into the river; only I wanted to be certain it was the right one before I did any killing."

"How could you have made certain of that, Laborde?"

"Easy enough."

"Tell me how."

"Well, in my youth I was a sailor; then I went to work at the iron works. Afterward I followed the sea again."

"I know all that."

"When I was at sea I learned how to tattoo pretty well, and when I took the baby to Havre I pricked two letters into the skin of the kid's back between his shoulders."

"What letters were they?"

"His father's initials, 'H. L.'"

"You think they are there now?"

"I am sure of it."

"Was there anything else by which the boy could be identified?"

"Yes. I have already seen that."

"What is it?"

"When Paul brought the kid to me the night he stole it, the baby was wearing one of those strings of buttons its crazy mother used to make. Up there in that room where I was arrested, I saw the same buttons sewed on the breast of the boy's coat in the shape of a heart."

"Are you sure they were the same?"

"Dead sure."

"Fifteen years is a long time to remember buttons."

"Well, maybe it is, but I remembered them all the same. But, anyhow, that wasn't necessary."

"Why not?"

"Because the boy you know as Buttons is a perfect image of what Paul used to be himself; in other words, just like the old man. He's the kid. That is certain."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MAN WHO KNEW.

"Tell me now how it happened that the father was made to believe that the child was born dead?" asked the detective.

"Oh, as for that, nothing was easier. Old Henri had not been himself for weeks, at the time. When the child was born he was away from home, at the baths of Aux le Bains. He did not know that there had been a birth till two weeks after it, and then he was told the lie. But before that time the kid had been disposed of."

"And then——"

"He was assured that it was dead when it was born; he was shown the grave where it was buried. That was all. It never occurred to him to question the truth of it."

"Were the young women mixed up in that plot, too?"

"Yes; but they are dead now."

"You never heard of the Rodins after you gave them the thousand francs?"

"Never."

"But you have no doubt now that Buttons is that baby?"

"Not a particle."

"If you should see the tattoo marks on his back that you placed on the back of the baby, it would entirely convince you?"

"Naturally."

"You will make affidavit to all this when the proper time comes?"

"Willingly."

"Now, will you tell me how you think I can find Paul Lafarge?"

"He has a friend who keeps a café and restaurant, down on South Fifth Avenue. I haven't any doubt that if he is in the city he would hang out there."

"Who is the friend, and where is the restaurant?"

"His name is Moulin. He keeps a restaurant near Washington Square. I don't know the number, but you won't have any difficulty in finding it, having the name."

"No. I imagine not. But suppose Lafarge has left the city, where do you think he would go?"

"It's about a thousand to one that he wouldn't leave the city; but in case he did so—well, I don't know. You try Moulin's, and if he isn't there, come back and see me again."

"Very well. I will do that."

"Will you tell me why you are so anxious to find him, Mr. Carter?"

"Because Buttons has disappeared, and I think that Lafarge knows where he is."

"Oho! Why didn't you tell me that at first."

"I didn't think it was necessary."

"You thought that maybe I'd refuse to talk if I knew that. Isn't that the reason?"

"Possibly it is."

"Well, you don't know me. I would have talked all the quicker."

"Would you?"

"Yes. Shall I tell you why?"

"If you care to do so."

"Because I always felt a little bit ashamed of making war on a baby like that. I had already made up my mind that when Paul and I went after the kid to do him up and throw him in the river, that I'd save the kid and stick a knife into Paul instead. I hate Paul. He's such a white-livered baby himself. And now——"

"Now he has deserted you."

"Yes. I haven't forgotten that, Mr. Carter."

"Have you any idea what he would do with Buttons?"

"No; only I know what he wouldn't do."

"You mean he would not kill him?"

"Yes. He hasn't got the courage. He'll make him suffer, all right. He would torture him if he took the notion; but he wouldn't kill him."

"Do you suppose that the man Moulin would assist Paul in this business?"

"I don't know as to that; but as likely as not. He's a regular Apache, Moulin is."

"Do you think it likely that Buttons is detained in that place?"

"Well, no; I hardly think they would keep him there. It would be too risky."

"What, in your opinion, knowing those men as you do, would they do with him? What disposition would they make of him?"

"Well, I can only tell you what Paul's idea about it was when he was talking with me about getting rid of the kid."

"What was that?"

"He was for putting him aboard a ship and sending him off to South Africa. It was I who suggested that he be put out of the way entirely—but I meant all the while that it should be Paul and not the kid."

"So you think that now Buttons may have been put aboard a ship and sent out of the country?"

"I can't say. I'm only telling you what I know about it."

"How large a place is Moulin's?"

"It's a big place; he occupies a whole building and the basement. He has got a café, a restaurant, some rooms for gambling and for other purposes, too. He's a bad one, is Moulin."

"If Lafarge is there, he would likely enough be in disguise, wouldn't he?"

"I should suppose so, since that is about the only thing he can do well."

"Oh, is he an adept at that business?"

"He's a good one at it, and no mistake."

Nick Carter and Chief Gereaux left the Tombs very soon after that and returned to the detective's house together. While on their way there, the Parisian said:

"Nick, shall we investigate that café and restaurant to-night?"

"Yes; that is my present intention."

"Then I think it is my turn to work."

"How so?"

"The work will be among French crooks. Remember that they are a class with which I am entirely familiar; even more so than you are."

"Yes, indeed."

"When we get to your house I shall sacrifice my beard and my mustache. Then I shall adopt a disguise which I used frequently to make use of in Paris. I have not used it in many years, but it is a character in which I once made it a practise to consort with all the bad characters of our city."

"I see."

"I never used it for the purposes of betrayal. I am remembered in that character as one who was as bad

as the worst of them. It is just possible that there may be a Frenchman at that place to-night who will remember Bras de Fer, for that is how I was known."

"Bras de Fer. Ironarm, eh? That was a good name."

"It may prove useful to us to-night. As I say, it is not unlikely that there will be one or more at the Moulin place to-night who will remember Bras de Fer; or if they do not remember me in that character, as having seen me, they will know of the reputation I earned in the character. I will be welcome. Besides, I know all their secret passwords and signs, and the Parisian crook has many of them."

"Yes. I know that."

"It will be interesting, anyhow. I quite look forward to it."

"What will you suggest for me?"

"Oh, as to that I have an excellent idea."

"What is it?"

"I had a man who was on my staff at the time—he is since dead—who used to go with me sometimes when I appeared as Bras de Fer. I can make you up so you will look almost exactly as he did. He was known among the people of the under world as Boulanger."

"Then to-night I will be Boulanger?"

"Yes."

"What is the best hour to appear among them, chief, since you are to take the lead in this affair?"

"Not too late; about half-after eleven, or between that and midnight."

"Just about the hour I would have selected."

"Yes? Ha! I look forward to it. I am like the war horse who smells powder. Since I have been at the head of my department I have not had much opportunity to exercise my talents."

"And you hunger for the chase, eh?"

"I really think I do."

"Well, there is satisfaction in the thought that to-night you will be working in an exceptionally good cause."

"Yes; that is so."

"And I shall look to you, chief, to tell me exactly how to establish Buttons in his rights when the time comes to do so."

"You may rely upon me to do all that. It will not be so difficult. My own testimony in the matter will go very far toward the establishment."

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"And yours as well. And then, when I have made my report about the other cases; about the matters that brought me to this country, it will be seen that the whole thing is associated with this affair of the Lafarge heir. Oh, it will not be difficult."

"The most difficult part of it all will be to-night, in getting at the information we must have."

"Possibly, Nick, since I am to appear as Bras de Fer, that will not be difficult at all. In that character I made a reputation among that class of people which is talked about yet. I chose to disappear very suddenly as Bras de Fer, and they have never settled it in their own minds what became of me. I have been a mystery, and hence all the more talked about among them."

"I see."

"And now I choose to appear again, as suddenly as I disappeared. It will excite comment, even if I am not personally known."

"Only in that case they might think that, perhaps, you are a fraud; that you are not the real Bras de Fer."

"Oh, no; there is a way in which I can prove that to them."

"How?"

"You shall see that to-night when we are at the café."

"Very well. You will have to help me with my make-up, for I don't in the least know how Boulanger should appear."

"Ha! that is easy. I will first give you a specimen of the character, and then you shall imitate me. You can do that."

"Oh, yes, I can do that."

"Ah! my dear Nick, here we are at the house. Really, it is splendid, that idea of getting into harness again to-night. I look forward to it. This being a chief over a great lot of men is pleasant in a way, but one does not get the excitement out of it that one should. I have often envied you since I have been over here."

"Maybe you'll get all the excitement you want, to-night."

"I hope so, indeed. I look forward to it."

CHAPTER IX.

BRAS DE FER AND BOULANGER.

The detective, accompanied by the chief of the Paris secret police, arrived at Moulin's restaurant in South Fifth Avenue soon after half-past eleven that

same evening, but any person who otherwise would have known either of these gentlemen certainly would have passed them by unrecognized that night because of the great changes that each of them had made in his appearance.

Gereaux, through his resolve, had sacrificed his beard and mustache, and that fact alone would have altered him so greatly that he would have passed without recognition save among those by whom he was exceedingly well known.

But in addition to that he had dyed his hair with a preparation the ingredients of which he procured at a drug-store for the purpose, and which he manufactured himself.

He announced to Nick Carter that, although he invariably experienced great difficulty in removing the dye from his hair he infinitely preferred it to a wig, and principally because one of his favorite gestures, when passing under the character of Bras de Fer, was to run his fingers through his hair and so leave it standing straight upward like the comb of a cock.

And this simile is not illogical when we are told that the color it had assumed under the dye stuff changed it to a brilliant and most astonishing red.

The chief's eyebrows were unusually bushy and large and naturally very black; and, therefore, these had to undergo the same operation as his hair.

His teeth, which were naturally even and perfect and very white, he discolored with the use of another self-made preparation, which rendered them as revolting in appearance as they were naturally attractive.

By the deft use of certain stains he produced a livid scar which ran across the left side of his face from the lobe of the ear to the point of his chin.

His complexion he darkened considerably, and he managed somehow to impart to his white and perfectly manicured hands a condition of griminess which might have excited the envy of a half-washed coal-dealer, while his finger-nails always perfectly manicured now suggested agricultural possibilities.

For his costume he selected a very Frenchy outfit from Nick Carter's wardrobe, but even here he made some alterations before donning it.

He chose to go to the restaurant without a collar around his throat, substituting in its place a crimson tie of silk which was held in place by being fastened to the bosom of his shirt by a yellow diamond stick-pin, the stone being of unusual large proportions and wonderfully brilliant under artificial light.

This stone he took from his purse when he was dressing, and he explained to Nick Carter that it was one of the individual marks of Bras de Fer.

As another mark of genuineness in this character he wore upon the third finger of his left hand a silver ring of peculiar design, and that ring alone he told Nick would establish his identity among any gathering of French crooks, who had ever operated in Paris.

Lastly, he carried in his hand a unique cane, which he had to send to his hotel to procure, it being among his baggage. It did not at all resemble a sword-cane, and yet when he received it from the hotel he released a gleaming rapier from it and exhibited it to Nick as being one of the best pieces of steel he had ever seen.

Gereaux, of course, superintended the make-up which Nick Carter adopted in representing Gereaux's former assistant, Boulanger.

This was a very simple disguise, and would have been very easily accomplished only for the fact that there was always the possibility that they might encounter at Moulin's place one or more persons who had seen and known Bras de Fer and Boulanger in Paris.

And so it would not do that any mistake should be made even in so unimportant a character as Boulanger to excite the suspicion of any persons they might encounter there.

They entered the place by mounting the steps to the front door, for it was located in one of the old residential houses of South Fifth Avenue.

The parlor, back parlor, and extension were given up to the uses of a restaurant, and while it was at once evident that it did not belong to the same class and character as the resorts of this kind farther uptown, there was still nothing to indicate that it was not entirely respectable.

A glance around the establishment was sufficient to inform Nick that it was not the part of the place they wished to investigate, and so they passed down the steps to the basement floor where they found the bar and café proper, and where there were innumerable tables also for the accommodation of the guests.

There were men and women dining in both places, and the incessant jabbering of the French language made that basement room sound as if a colony of magpies had just escaped imprisonment and were talking it over.

Moulin himself was there immaculate in a broad expanse of shirt-front upon which glistened a diamond as large as his thumb-nail, and, perceiving instantly that he had two new customers to entertain,

he hastened forward with his most Parisian bow and volubly started to conduct Nick and the chief toward a corner table when Gereaux exclaimed in a half under tone and in French:

"Why, my friend, is it possible that you have forgotten me?"

Moulin wheeled about as if he had been struck, and his face had paled perceptibly in that instant.

At the first glance he obtained of his guest now, however, he cried out intermixing his language with many an expletive, which we will not repeat here since they were in French:

"Why, Bras de Fer, is it possible!"

"Quite so," replied the chief laconically, "but how is it that I find you here, Emile?"

"Ah! I have been here a long time now, my friend," was the quick reply.

"And are you the proprietor?"

"Yes, my master, why not?"

Gereaux chuckled audibly.

"You were not known as Monsieur Moulin when I saw you last," he said, in a low tone.

"There, there, my friend. It makes no difference. Moulin is as good a name as any other. It does not matter by what name we call our friends so long as they remain quite friendly."

They were at the table by this time, and as Nick and Gereaux dropped upon their chairs, Moulin asked:

"And how is it, Bras de Fer, that I find you in New York?"

Gereaux looked up at the proprietor and deliberately closed one eye as he replied, with a sardonic grin, which seemed visibly to move the scar on his face:

"Doubtless my friend for the same reason that you are here. Because the climate of Paris has ceased for a time to agree with me."

Moulin shrugged his shoulders, and with a slight gesture toward Nick Carter, asked:

"And your friend?"

"Ah!" said Gereaux, "is it possible that you have never made the acquaintance of Boulanger?"

"So," said Moulin, looking closely at Nick. "This is Boulanger, is it? I am glad to make your acquaintance, monsieur. I have heard of you often but we never happened to meet before."

Nick acknowledged the introduction, but preferred to remain quiet. He was quite interested in observing how Gereaux would carry out the part he was playing.

The first duty, however, to which Gereaux attended was the ordering of a substantial meal, and in preparation for this he had himself gone without his dinner that night and persuaded Nick Carter to do the same for the reason, as he explained, that Bras de Fer had the reputation of being a great eater.

Just now the chief, when the bill of fare was handed to him, turned it face down upon the table, and he said to the proprietor:

"Emile, my friend, it is not necessary that I should examine this. You know me so well and so thoroughly understand the things I like to eat that I will leave the ordering of my meal to your good selection, only I pray you see that everything is of the best and that there is plenty of it. As for wine, Emile, we will have the best and you shall bring up a chair and share it with us."

Moulin bowed his gratitude for this gracious speech and hurried away to the kitchen to give the order in person.

He was no sooner out of hearing than Gereaux, speaking rapidly and in a low tone, said:

"I think, Nick, that the way will be made comparatively easy for us now. This man Emile owes me many favors in the character of Bras de Fer, and he will do everything in his power to gratify my slightest wish. On no account, however, must we say or do a thing which will lead him to suppose that we are not exactly what we appear to be."

Moulin, returning at that moment, drew a chair to the table; as he seated himself Gereaux asked him:

"I have been wondering, Emile, if any of my old acquaintances are in New York;" and Moulin smilingly replied:

"I think there will be three or four here whom you know quite well."

"There are none here now, then?"

"No, monsieur, it is a little bit early yet. In another hour, however, this room will be filled. Every table will be occupied."

"By whom?"

Moulin waved his hands and shrugged his shoulders, smiling as he blew a cloud of smoke toward the ceiling.

"By the best fellows in the world, Bras de Fer," he said contently. "Most of them, like ourselves, left Paris because of the climate."

"I saw a name in the paper not long ago," said Gereaux, as if he were trying to remember the exact date, "which reminded me of a combat that happened in your place in Paris some years ago. The name was Francois Laborde."

"Ah, yes," said Moulin and sighed, "but Francois will not be here to-night. He is in prison."

CHAPTER X.

THE MAN IN DISGUISE.

"There were other names mentioned in the article I read about our friend Francois," said the chief, after a moment's pause, during which the soup was brought to them, "and there was one among them which I seemed to recall without remembering it. Perhaps, Emile, you can tell me who it is?"

"To whom do you refer?" asked the proprietor.

"Lafarge was the name, and I never knew but one Lafarge, and he was not in our line. He was an iron-master."

"This man, Bras de Fer, is his son."

"Well," the chief shrugged his shoulders and held his hands for an instant with their palms outward. "He must be rather poor quality of a man if that newspaper account was correct. It made him out a coward. I hope, my dear Emile, that such a man as that is not numbered among your friends. I should almost be sorry to renew our acquaintance if that were the case."

"Hush, hush, my dear monsieur!" exclaimed Moulin, under his breath.

"And why, pray?' replied Gereaux, leaning back in his chair and thrusting his thumbs in the arm-hole of his waistcoat. "And why should I hush, Emile? I am not one who hushes. Is he, then, a friend of yours? Is this man Lafarge among your guests even now, perhaps?"

"Hush! I beg of you, Bras de Fer."

"But why?"

"Because we are not in Paris now, monsieur. We are in New York."

The loud and prolonged laugh which Gereaux uttered filled the room and caused every eye in the place to be turned in their direction.

During it Moulin was visibly agitated, and, while leaning forward as if to arrange the things upon the table, he whispered hurriedly into Gereaux's ear:

"He is at the next table even now, Bras de Fer. I beg of you to be discreet and quiet, and not to offend him since at present he is one of my best customers."

"Oh, very well, very well," the chief replied, in a loud tone, and then, lowering his voice, he added:

"But point him out to me, Emile."

"He is directly behind you, but is seated with his back toward you."

At this statement Gereaux frankly turned squarely around in his chair and stared at the back of the guest who had been mentioned; and after a moment of this scrutiny on his part he resumed his former position, and, with a shrug of his shoulders, said, still speaking in an undertone:

"Upon my word, Emile, the appearance of his back entirely bears out the opinion I had formed of the man, but since he is one of your good customers and he spends his money here, I assure you, my friend, I will do nothing to offend him. But surely, Moulin—it seems strange to call you by that name—but surely he must be in disguise, since at this moment in appearance he is quite as old as his father should be."

"Yes," Moulin nodded, "he is in disguise."

"Has he, then, been cracking a safe or squirming his body through a second-story window?"

"No, monsieur, he is under bonds to appear at the next assizes, and a few days ago he boldly took a train out of the city and returned here later in disguise."

"Ah! I understand, he has jumped his bail."

"No, Bras de Fer, for the time has not yet expired, but he means to do so."

Gereaux sat silent for a moment, then employing himself with the food that had been placed before

them, but as soon as that course was finished, he rose abruptly from his chair and crossed to the table at which Paul Lafarge, now having every appearance of being a man of seventy years old, was seated.

He made the move so quickly that even Moulin could not interfere with it or prevent it, and he sat rigidly watching the actions of Bras de Fer until the latter let his hand fall gently upon Lafarge's shoulder and announced, so that every one in the room could hear what he said:

"My old friend Moulin informs me that you and I are former acquaintances, monsieur. I am Bras de Fer, and would appreciate the compliment if you would remove to our table and drink a glass of wine with us."

Had Gereaux made this request in a lower tone, so that only the object of it could have understood its import, it would unquestionably have been refused; but under the circumstances as they were, there was nothing to do but to accept the somewhat imperative invitation, since his own glass was empty and there was no food in front of him.

He arose, therefore, with some reluctance, badly concealing his impatience, and crossed to the next table at which Nick and Moulin were still seated.

As the man approached him, Nick remembered what Frank Laborde had said during their interview at the Tombs when he announced that the only thing that Paul Lafarge could do well was to create disguises for himself.

Nick Carter, as he watched the man approach him, realized that, had he met Lafarge upon the street, he would have permitted him to pass unrecognized, so deftly had he wrought his make-up.

He carried out every principle of it, too.

He walked totteringly and with the slight hesitation and uncertainty which goes with age; and when he dropped upon the chair that had been brought forward for his benefit he did it with the air of one who was glad to be seated again; as if it had been an effort for him to move from one table to the other.

Gereaux busied himself by filling a glass with wine for the benefit of their additional guest, and then, having asked him if he would have something to eat, the request being declined, he said:

"I read something in the papers about you not long ago, my friend;" and Lafarge half-started from his seat, anger blazing in his eyes.

"Then Moulin has told you who I am," he announced.

Gereaux laughed boisterously.

"Moulin tells me everything," he said. "There are no secrets between Emile and I. We have fought together and bled together. I have gone to him when there was no other place in which to hide myself—just as you have done, now, my friend. But tell me, if you please, why do you desert your friends who are in prison when you yourself are at liberty?"

Anger still blazed in Lafarge's eyes, but he controlled himself as with an effort, and presently replied:

"It would avail them nothing if I remained in prison. I could not benefit them. I was fortunate enough to secure bail. A little later, Monsieur Bras de Fer, after the bond has been forfeited and the hue and cry after me is given up, then, perhaps, I can do something for them. I have not deserted them; I am only awaiting a chance to aid them."

"Ah! I see. A good answer, my friend. But I read something in that same paper which gave an account of the arrest by a great detective here whose name I forget. Who was he, by the way?"

"His name is Nick Carter," said Moulin, with an ugly scowl. "He is the only man I fear in all New York."

"Ah! yes," continued Gereaux, "Nick Carter, I have it now. As I was saying, I read something in that account that was funny; perhaps it was not true, Monsieur Lafarge."

"Hush, Bras de Fer! Not that name here, if you please," interrupted Moulin; and Gereaux, with a shrug of his shoulders, continued:

"Perhaps it was not true, Monsieur Paul?"

"To what do you refer?" was the answering question.

"Why, the account I read in the paper—I think it was a Chicago paper, because I have just returned from the West—stated that monsieur, I will not mention the name again, Monsieur Paul was prevented

from escaping by a mere chit of a lad who stopped him at the doorway with a pistol that wasn't loaded."

"It's a lie," said Lafarge savagely.

"Oh, I supposed it was a lie, but it was none the less comical, monsieur."

"It was a lie," repeated Lafarge.

"Undoubtedly; but there was a boy, wasn't there?"

"Yes, there was a boy, but why do you insist upon talking about this, Bras de Fer?"

"For my amusement, my friend. Do I offend you?"

"No, no, no, but why discuss it?"

"For my entertainment, naught else. Tell me about the boy."

"There is nothing to tell about the boy."

"Oh, yes, pardon me, there must be. The account was so comical. It spoke about a boy who was covered with buttons; a little fellow it said, eight or nine years old. I think they even called him Buttons."

Nick Carter had been watching this by-play with a great deal of interest.

He understood in the beginning exactly what Gereaux was getting at; he realized that the chief was gradually bringing the conversation around to the point where he could introduce the name of Buttons.

And when at last the boy was mentioned and particularly when it arrived at the point where he referred to the many buttons with which the lad's clothing was decorated, Nick could see that Moulin stiffened in his chair; that the blood left his rather florid face, and that the man appeared as if he were greatly worried over the turn that the conversation had taken.

More than that, Lafarge himself opened and closed his hands nervously, and was decidedly ill at ease.

But the supposed Bras de Fer appeared not to notice any of these things at all. He seemed only interested in the fact that the article he had read in the paper was amusing, and he had the air of one who was purposely teasing another and who delighted in doing so.

Nick was more than pleased by the manner in which Gereaux was playing the skilful game of parrying wit against wit.

He realized that in dealing with the French character, here was a man who had not his equal anywhere.

CHAPTER XI.

THE ROOM ON THE TOP FLOOR.

Gereaux changed the subject quite abruptly then and asked for the latest news from Paris. He felt that he had badgered Lafarge and Moulin quite all that was necessary.

It was a condition which it would not be wise to overdo.

Men of the character of this proprietor and his guest can be driven just so far and no further without creating suspicion, and no one was better aware of this fact than Henri Gereaux, chief of the secret police of Paris.

Therefore, he asked for the latest news from "the only city on earth."

Instantly Moulin was all volubility, and Lafarge himself, as if greatly relieved by the turn the conversation had taken, became eager to impart all the information he had at hand and much more that he manufactured for the occasion as Gereaux quickly surmised.

Presently Moulin left them, called away by the arrival of other guests, and a few moments after that Lafarge got upon his feet and begged to be excused.

"You are not going away, are you?" said the supposed Bras de Fer.

"Oh, no, not for another hour at least; but you know just now I am a very old man, no matter what I may be a week hence."

Gereaux nodded, indicating that he understood.

"So I retire early," continued Lafarge.

"You room here, then?"

"Oh, yes, indeed. Like what you just said about Moulin, I find his house a place of refuge."

"Good, Monsieur Paul, I only hope you have a pleasant room."

"Thank you, I have the pleasantest in the house, the rear room on the top floor."

"Excellent! most excellent! It keeps you away from the street, but, nevertheless, you have the air; and if you are careful to draw the blinds at your windows, inquisitive neighbors at the rear of their houses may not see you when you become young again after retiring to your room."

Lafarge walked away then, and for a moment the two detectives were quite alone, and they leaned forward across the table in order that they might converse together in low tones without the chance that their conversation would be overheard.

"Well, Nick, what do you think of it?" asked Gereaux.

"Why, it begins to look to me as if we had the game in our own hands," replied the detective.

"Are you quite satisfied with the way I play it?"

"Quite. It couldn't be done any better."

"We have accomplished considerable already," Gereaux went on. "We have found Lafarge and where Lafarge is it is pretty safe to say the boy will not be far away."

"I think," said Nick, "judging from the action of the two men while you were talking about Buttons that he is somewhere in this house at this moment."

"I have no doubt of it," said Gereaux.

"But where?"

"More than likely in the room occupied by Lafarge, top floor rear."

"In that case," said Nick, "I'm going to make it my business to investigate that room without delay."

"Exactly what I was about to suggest, my dear Nick, if only you can find a reasonable excuse to ascend the stairs."

"There is one I think of which might work out splendidly," said the detective.

"What is that?"

"I might ask Moulin to give me accommodations for the night."

"True. I hadn't thought of that. Wait, here he comes. I will ask him."

The chief signaled to Moulin who approached them at once and inquired:

"How can I serve you, messieurs?"

"What accommodations have you in the house, Emile?" asked the supposed Bras de Fer.

"None at all, my friend. I am very sorry, but every room is taken."

"So? is it so? Well, in that case, put somebody out?"

"Ah! indeed, I could not do that, Bras de Fer. As I said before, we are not in Paris. We are in New York."

"Nonsense, man, Paris, New York, London, Vienna, Berlin, St. Petersburg, Lisben, Madrid, they are all the same to me. It is all one."

He brought his hand down upon the table with a resounding slap.

"Where Bras de Fer asks for accommodation he gets it."

Then he leaned forward to the proprietor, and in a fierce whisper he demanded:

"Emile, my friend, do I get accommodation here or do I not? I am asking my old friend, Emile, whose other name I do not mention."

"I will see what can be done, monsieur," replied Moulin, trembling.

"Answer me!" thundered Gereaux, with another resounding slap upon the table.

"Yes, yes, monsieur; pray not so loud. I will fit you out somehow."

"But when and where? Show me the room at once!"

"Will one room be sufficient for monsieur and his friend Boulanger?" asked Moulin, with an insinuating shrug.

"Quite, if there are two beds in it, or a bed and a cot."

"Ah! if that is the case, I think I can accommodate you finely," he said, rubbing his hands together. "It shall be done, have no fear."

"Yes, but take us to the room so that we can see it; see where it is; or, better still, take Boulanger to the room while I remain here and finish this wine, then he will know where to conduct me."

Moulin, who was now all smiles and who had quite recovered his poise, turned with a bow to Nick Carter and announced:

"If Monsieur Boulanger will be kind enough to accompany me, I will show him the room."

Nick Carter, who had managed to pour into the cuspidor beside him all the wine that had been put into his glass, arose rather unsteadily to his feet and

with a grunt of approval followed Moulin from the room.

They ascended three flights of stairs, which went up directly through the hallway from the basement, and there he was ushered into the front room.

The detective had noticed in reaching the landing of the last flight of stairs that there was still another flight of them which ascended to the floor under the roof at right angles from the stairs below it, and that he judged to be where Lafarge's room was located.

Upon entering the apartment to which he was conducted the detective stumbled forward as if the quantity of wine he was supposed to have consumed had rendered him sleepy and heavy, and the gas having been lighted for him by the proprietor he threw himself at full length upon the bed with the remark:

"Look here, Moulin, you go back down-stairs and tell Bras de Fer that I'm going to stay up here and take a nap. You tell him that if I wake up by and by I'll go down again."

"Shall I extinguish the gas for monsieur?" asked Moulin.

"No; leave it burning just as it is, and please get out. If you don't, I'll be asleep before you close the door."

Moulin, with a smirking smile upon his face, backed through the door and closed it after him, and Nick Carter's quick ears detected the sound of a turning key, and he realized that he had been locked in.

"Now, I wonder what that means?" he asked himself. "I wonder if our friend Moulin thinks that Bras de Fer was a little bit too fresh, and that having separated us he proposes to take some sort of advantage of the opportunity thus afforded."

No sooner had the key turned in the lock than Nick was upon his feet again and tiptoed quickly and silently across the floor where he got upon his knees and pressed his ear against the sill, listening for the slightest sound of footfalls he could hear.

In this way he knew that Moulin ascended those stairs to the floor beneath the roof, but that he went only part way up them where he paused and seemed to listen, then he descended again to the hallway, stopped and listened for two or three minutes, after which he went on down the stairs to rejoin his guests.

From the position which the detective had assumed he could hear every footstep taken by Moulin until he was at the first floor, and Nick knew then that the coast was clear, at least for the time, so that he could do some investigating.

The mere fact that the door was locked against him was not to be considered, for, having anticipated the necessity for passing such barriers as that, the detective had brought with him all the necessary tools.

His little keyhole forceps presently gripped the plunger of the key and turned it as readily and easily as he might have done it from the opposite side of the door.

Then, before opening it, he stepped back and extinguished the light in his own room.

That accomplished he went boldly into the darkened hall, for Moulin had turned out the gas there, and felt his way along until he arrived at the stairway leading to the floor above.

A moment later he was ascending in the direction of the room described by Lafarge as the one he occupied.

CHAPTER XII.

NICK CARTER COLLECTS HIS FEE.

When Nick Carter reached the top of the stairs he paused long enough to listen intently, and, hearing no sound that indicated pursuit of any kind, he produced his electric torch and with it surveyed his surroundings.

The landing from the stairs opened into a large apartment in the center of the building, from which doors, front and rear, gave into other rooms.

Without hesitation the detective turned at once toward the door of that room at the rear of the house which he discovered to be made of heavy material and to be also locked against him. It was a Yale lock, and, therefore, impossible to manipulate with the little instrument that was ordinarily so efficacious.

But the detective had gone there prepared to overcome any obstacle that might present itself, and, although he expected now that discovery would be al-

most certain before he could finish what he had to do, he did not hesitate.

One of the instruments with which he had provided himself for the work of that night was a sectional "jimmy" small but powerful, and this he quickly produced from one of his pockets, and, having screwed it together, was ready to begin work.

First he tapped upon the door gently and then louder than before, but to neither of these summons did he receive any response.

Satisfied that if Buttons were indeed confined in that room, he was so situated that it was impossible for him to reply, Nick applied himself to the task in hand, attacking that edge of the door where the hinges were located rather than the one where the Yale lock held it so tightly in place.

The wonderful power exerted by a burglar's "jimmy" when properly handled was never better exemplified than in this particular case, and it was only a moment before the door began to give under the enormous pressure, and from the time Nick Carter applied the "jimmy" to its task until he was enabled to insert the fingers of his hand between the door and the casing, no more than two or three minutes could have elapsed.

One wrench after his hands were in this position was sufficient to tear the door from its fastenings, and, stepping back, he again resorted to his electric torch and threw a fierce glare of light into the room.

For a moment he saw nothing to indicate that Buttons might be there, but, having passed inside the room, he found that another door opened from it supposedly upon a closet, and as he approached this he heard a low moan from beyond it, or rather, a sound as if some one were trying to call and could not.

This door was also locked and with another Yale, but Nick Carter still held the jimmy in his grasp, and now putting all caution aside, he attacked it so vehemently that within the space of a minute he had torn the barrier from its fastenings and cast it upon the floor behind him.

He remembered in that instant another thing that Frank Laborde had told him. He had said:

"Paul Lafarge has not the courage to kill, but he can torture."

Poor little Buttons still resplendent in his strange decorations was tied in a standing position against the back wall of the closet, and he looked as if he had been there indefinitely. The lad's face was drawn and haggard, but his courage had not defaulted, and, although he did not recognize Nick Carter in the disguise he wore, he knew that it was a rescuer who had come to him.

"Hold me when you cut me loose," he said. "I am so cramped that I'm afraid I'll fall."

"Poor little chap," exclaimed Nick, in his natural tone.

And Buttons uttered a cry of delighted surprise.

"Mr. Carter!" he exclaimed. "I am so glad you have come."

You may be sure that Nick Carter did not occupy much time in liberating the boy from the bonds that held him, and then he lifted him in his arms and laid him for a moment upon the bed.

He brought water for the lad to drink and rubbed more of it upon his temples. He chafed his hands and spatted him until he got up the circulation, so that after a few moments of this treatment, Buttons started to his feet off the bed, exclaiming as he did so:

"I'm all right, now, Mr. Carter. I'm just as good as ever, but I don't think I'd had held out very much longer in that closet. I could hardly breathe in there."

The detective, nevertheless, picked Buttons up in his arms and started with him down the stairs without pausing to turn off the gas which he had lighted.

He had reached the landing on the floor where the room that had been assigned to him was located when there arose suddenly from the lower part of the building the sounds of a struggle intermingled with shouts, together with the crashing of glass and crockery, and these were quickly followed by several pistol-shots.

Nick realized only too well that by some means a fight had been precipitated, and he had not the slightest doubt that the undoing of Gereaux was the object of it.

"Buttons," he said rapidly, "I am going to carry you

to the first floor where I will open the door and put you outside. Then you run toward the square on your right. Find a policeman if you can and bring him here. There should be one about now on the corner directly above here."

Without waiting for an answer, he sprang down the stairs, hearing the shouts and curses from the basement as he proceeded, and having put Buttons outside the door as he had said he would do, he turned to descend to the basement himself, just as the struggle that was going on below came into the hallway and followed up the stairs.

In another instant Gereaux almost rushed into the arms of Nick Carter, and immediately behind him, in close pursuit came Moulin, followed by several others of his kind.

"All right, Gereaux," Nick Carter shouted, and he leaped past his friend just in time to grapple with Moulin himself.

Nick Carter's arms shot forward quickly, and Moulin felt himself raised from his feet and turned completely over; and then Nick Carter, having secured a good hold upon the man, whirled him with all the force he had, and shot him like the projectile from a catapult down those basement stairs straight at the heads of the other men who were ascending them.

Have you ever set up dominoes in a line to make what is called a Jacob's ladder?

If you have, you will know the effect of a human projectile hurled by an animated catapult, which in this instance was Nick Carter.

The attacking party went down as if they were so many straws before a sudden gust of wind, and while they were still falling and shouting Nick Carter turned again, and, with a sudden grasp upon Gereaux's arm, rushed him to the front door, opened it, and dragged him through it to the steps outside the house.

Just as they emerged Buttons appeared at the bottom of the steps accompanied by a policeman, and Nick called out to him:

"Rap for assistance, officer, and place every man in this house under arrest for disorderly conduct. In the morning I will appear against them, and there are two here whom I especially want."

"Who are you?" demanded the officer.

"I am Nick Carter," said the detective, showing his shield.

* * * * * * *

We could use up almost another story in describing the scenes that took place following upon these incidents, in recovering for Buttons, now known as Henri Lafarge, the property and wealth that had been amassed by his father.

But all that is not necessary. It is sufficient to state that in Gereaux, Buttons found an invaluable friend who saw him bravely and safely through all his difficulties, and who thoroughly established him in his rights in France.

We might also use up much space in describing the delight of Sandy Bragg and Captain Bill Gunn when on the following day after the incidents just described they were summoned to Nick Carter's house to meet Buttons again, now dressed in a new suit of clothes, and for the first time in his life content to be without his remarkable ornamentation.

Nick permitted them to hold a long conversation together, but when at last he did enter the room where they were, he turned with a quizzical smile to the two former river pirates, and he said:

"Sandy, and you, Bill, when I took this case to find Buttons, you each agreed to pay me a certain fee. I am here now to demand that payment. My fee was your promise that if I succeeded in finding Buttons you would both forsake the lives you had been leading and would become good citizens and good men. I ask you both now to fulfil that promise."

"Mr. Carter," said Sandy, extending his hand which Nick grasped without hesitation, "I can speak for both. Bill and I have talked it over. There's my hand on the word I gave you, and I'll keep my promise as long as I live. And there's Bill Gunn's hand, too. He's sticking it out now, and you can bet your sweet life that his word's as good as mine."

THE END.

The next number, 631, will be "The Man in the Biograph; or, Nick Carter's Nearest Approach to Error."

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AN ADVENTURE IN URUGUAY.

By GEORGE H. COOMER.

When the old worn-out ship, *Canova*, put into Montevideo, at the mouth of the Rio de la Plata, she was leaking so badly that it was all we could do to keep her afloat. Her timbers were rotten, and, to make the case worse, she had run into ice off Cape Horn, a mishap which came near being fatal.

However, she had a full cargo of oil, and, when a survey had been held on her, and she was condemned at the South American port, we fellows who had made the round voyage had something coming to us. All hands were paid off according to their various "lays," and then, putting on new suits of sailor "toggery," we had only to stroll about, seeing the sights of a country where none of us had ever been before.

I had a chum named Jack Laythan, an intelligent young man from the State of New York, and while our shipmates interested themselves in their own manner, we two determined that before going home we would see something of the interior of Uruguay.

Our first meeting with each other had been as green hands on board the *Canova* three years before, but our tastes being much alike, we at once became fast friends.

Before going to sea, both had been somewhat accustomed to the use of guns, and we delighted to talk of them. Jack, however, had the advantage of me, as he had killed a deer, while my chief exploit in boyhood had been the bringing down of a wild goose from a flock which flew over our house one April morning when I was about fifteen.

We were now nineteen years of age, and it was a long time since either of us had handled a firearm of any kind; but the old-time enthusiasm was not forgotten, and we had a keen desire to try our fortune upon the wide South American pampas, to which we were now so near. There was a bewitching charm in the thought of camping out all by ourselves upon those vast plains traversed by thousands of wild horses and equally wild cattle.

True, we did not leave out of the picture the prowling jaguar, with which, in the wilds of Uruguay, one is always in danger of meeting; but against this ferocious brute we hoped that our camp-fires by night and our guns by day would prove a sufficient protection. The danger might be considerable, but even this had its attractions, for we were young and full of confidence.

From a Boston man who kept a store in Montevideo we bought two guns and a supply of ammunition, some mosquito-netting, and a quantity of light cotton cloth sufficient for a small tent. Two hunting-knives, a coffee-pot, and a couple of tin cups completed our equipment; and with such furnishings we probably made a somewhat picturesque appearance upon starting out for our field of operations.

First of all we went by rail from Montevideo to Colonia, a distance of nearly a hundred miles, and thence, taking passage in a native bungo, which is the Spanish name for small craft, proceeded up the Uruguay River.

It was plain that the boatmen had not a very high opinion of us as hunters, and we could see also that they made themselves merry over our ambitious attempts at mastering Spanish sentences; yet, nevertheless, they were such good-natured fellows that we got on swimmingly with them.

The bungo, which was going up after hides and horns, made slow progress against the current, yet everything was so new to us that the voyage was not in the least tedious. The river abounded with water-fowl, and the shots we made at the birds were so successful as evidently to raise us much in the estimation of our companions.

We saw vast masses of wild cattle at a distance, but the most thrilling spectacle was that of a jaguar lying upon a log which extended out into the river. He had one paw resting in the water, and was apparently engaged in fishing. Indeed, we soon had ample demonstration that such was the case. As we watched him, the big paw, serving at once for bait and hook, suddenly whipped out a shining prize, with which the captor quickly retreated to the shore. We fired at him, but with no perceptible effect, and he disappeared among the tall grass of the bank.

The Uruguayans had only two old flint-lock guns, and both of these missed fire; so that when we proposed by signs and words that the bungo should go nearer the shore, our boatmen friends shook their heads. They would take no more risks than they could help. They knew the jaguar to be a great swimmer, and the river was none too wide at best, they seemed to think.

The picture of that lithe, powerful beast, which we knew to be one of the fiercest creatures in the world, lying with his broad paw in the water, or bounding up the bank with the big fish between his jaws, impressed us with a sense of our surroundings more than anything that we had previously seen.

At night the bungo anchored in the middle of the stream, and the next morning proceeded as before. A second night was passed, and on the following day we arrived at a trading-station, consisting of a small village inhabited by Gauchos, or half-breeds, who lived by catching wild horses for sale, and hunting the cattle of the pampas for their hides, horns, and tallow, which were sent down to Montevideo.

Our appearance among them excited some curiosity, but although they seemed to be little better than savages, we found nothing to complain of in their treatment of us—the greatest drawback which we experienced being in our lack of Spanish, of which we could master so few sentences.

Here we saw horses in all stages of training, from wild to tame; and the feats of the Gauchos in maintaining their positions upon the backs of some of these vicious creatures were wonderful. Jack and I might have procured horses

at a very low price, but the value we set upon our necks decided us to do our hunting on foot.

We could take our own time for it, camping where and when we pleased, and should any large game fall before our bullets or buckshot, we would make a present of it to our half-savage friends, who would gladly accept it as coming within the line of their business. So we set out from the little hamlet to try our fortune in the great solitudes where there was so much to excite our interest.

Although the pampas stretched out on every side, it must not be supposed that the entire country was an unbroken plain. On the contrary, there was a considerable diversity of surface, with occasional thickets and clumps of trees. Upon the whole, however, one was impressed with the idea of an immense meadow, where the treeless spaces so preponderated as to make all else seem insignificant.

That day we traveled a number of miles, setting up our diminutive tent as it grew near sunset, and cooking our supper in the most approved style of wild hunters. We had killed a few birds and some other small game, but felt a little disappointed at not having been able to obtain a shot at either wild cattle or deer, though we had seen multitudes of both.

Great as was our dread of jaguars, we had, at the same time, a strong desire to meet with one; yet neither these nor any other animals of the cat family had crossed our path during the day.

Our camp was pitched in a hollow about a hundred yards from the river. There were no trees at the spot, but we gathered some drift branches which the Uruguay had deposited in previous freshets, and with these kept a fire the greater part of the night, though it went out before morning.

Awaking soon after daybreak, we were conscious of hearing a succession of indistinct sounds, as from some creature in motion at a little distance; and, taking up our guns, we peered cautiously over the ridge which enclosed our hollow. Parting some tufts of thick grass, which prevented us from being seen, we gazed out upon the pampa.

What an exciting spectacle met our eyes! In plain view, and scarcely more than half a furlong from us, was an immense herd of wild horses. The splendid animals were grazing upon the rich green grass, without the least suspicion of our proximity. The ridge prevented them from seeing our tent, and they were gradually getting nearer. At times, with a quick toss of the head and a half-gallop, some of them would change their position; while from the great herd of so many thousand hoofs there came a continuous muffled sound not easy to describe.

They were of various colors, precisely like domestic horses—some bay, others roan, and many of a deep creamy hue. Some were perfectly black, some milk-white; while not a few were beautifully mottled with white and black or white and red.

Their enormous column was extended at great length parallel with the river, so that we were shut in between the Uruguay and this living mass, of which, from our position, we could see neither end. The vast army, however, did not seem to reach far back, having apparently stretched out in length so that the depth was diminished to a comparatively short space.

We had not the least thought of firing at them—they were so magnificent, so truly glorious in their wild strength and beauty.

Suddenly, while we watched them, there was a great commotion in their ranks. A thousand heads were tossed aloft, manes and tails were flung out like banners, and a wild, terrific snorting filled all the air. It could not be ourselves that had caused the alarm, for all the animals were grazing in the opposite direction.

Then they wheeled toward us, and with a prodigious rush came thundering directly for our camp. There was some enemy upon the outside of the herd.

Only one chance remained for us—we must gain the river or be trodden into the earth. Springing out of the hollow, we ran for life—yes, almost flew—with the uproar of those countless hoofs close upon our tracks! The weight of that rushing mass seemed to make the very pampa tremble.

Leaping down the river-bank, we waded to the depth of our armpits, holding our guns above our heads. It would have been useless to fire, for the frantic horses could not have swerved aside if they would. Plunging, floundering, and finally swimming, they turned the Uruguay into a living mass of heads and manes and tails! Yet, once in the water, their progress was, of course, much slower than on land, and, although every moment in danger of being overwhelmed by them, we had here some little chance of avoiding a direct contact.

With our shoulders just above water, we stood swinging our guns about us in a terrified endeavor to protect ourselves, but more than once we were staggered and nearly thrown down. We could touch the swimming steeds with our hands, and it seemed a marvel that we did not get fairly wedged among them as they passed.

It was an unspeakable relief to see at last that they had nearly all gone by, so that we were no longer in danger of being crushed by their wild, mad flight.

But now, all of a sudden, the cause of the mighty stampede was revealed; and the discovery thrilled us from head to foot. In the very rear of the herd two noble horses were helplessly floundering, with a pair of huge jaguars clinging to their shoulders. The poor victims were overcome in a few moments, and the fierce beasts began dragging them toward the shore—swimming as they tugged at their bulky prey.

It was plain that they had observed us, for we could see their blazing eyes turned in our direction with a look which seemed to defy all meddling. Our guns were wet, but fortunately the caps were water-proof, and so, with very little hesitation, we decided upon hazarding a shot.

Standing in the water, we took careful aim, each selecting his mark; but I know that my heart beat very fast and am quite sure that Jack's did, also. It was an aim which might mean life or death for us.

As the heavy reports of our guns broke upon the air, there was a moment of terrible uncertainty. Then, as the smoke was blown away, we saw both jaguars kicking upon their backs, their convulsive struggles throwing the water in all directions.

We took good care not to approach them until all signs of life were gone, and then dragged them on shore, where we found that each had been hit fairly in the head by a number of our large buckshot.

Both of the ferocious creatures were big fellows, with stout legs and fearfully broad claws; but, notwithstanding their fierce, grim look and bloodthirsty character, they were certainly very handsome, with their fine proportions and superbly spotted coats.

The work of skinning them was a difficult one for our unpractised hands, but we nevertheless accomplished it, and in the course of the day were fortunate enough to get the hides as well as ourselves taken down to the Gaucho village in a native canoe.

The Uruguayans, whom we had left at the place, appeared to be greatly interested in our adventure, and the jaguar-skin trophies did wonders for us in their estimation. We could hear them say: *"Bravo! mucho bueno!"* as they examined our prizes. Indeed, it was plain that whatever secret contempt they might previously have felt for *"los Gringos,"* as they called us, they now looked upon their visitors with a very considerable respect.

We remained for some time longer in Uruguay, and had other adventures, but none of a character so exciting as the one I have related.

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